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John Bright and the

American Civil War

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General Series

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Old South Leaflets.
General Series, V. 9. No. 218.



John Bright
AND THE
American Civil
War.

Edited by LAWRENCE V. ROTH.

Bright, John

INTRODUCTION.

In and out of Parliament, John Bright was the great English champion of American Union during the Civil War. His letters to Charles Sumner, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, had much effect on American foreign policy, especially in the Trent affair. At the outbreak of the war between North and South, the British Government declared its neutrality, recognizing a state of belligerency in the South. Up to the Battle of Gettysburg and the fall of Vicksburg, July 3-4, 1863, the English Government and the upper classes spent their moral influence for the South. It was not so much sympathy for the South, but the hope that the great experiment in Democracy in America might fail, and that the agitation in England for political reform might thereby cease. The laboring classes, whose cause of political liberty in England was clearly bound up with the success of the American Democracy, strongly favored the cause of the North, even though they suffered greatly by the shortage of cotton. In the speeches of John Bright there is an ardent and passionate appeal to the English people to support the cause of the North. Both sides, as well as the later neutrality of Gladstone, appear in the parliamentary debate of June, 1863.

LETTERS OF JOHN BRIGHT, 1861.

THE TRENT AFFAIR.

ROCHDALE, December 5, 1861.

Dear Mr. Sumner,—

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You know that I write to you with as much earnest wish for your national welfare as if I were a native and citizen of your country. I dread the consequences of war quite as much for your sakes as for our own. So great will be my horror of such a strife that I believe I shall retire from public life entirely, and no longer give myself to the vain hope of doing good among the fools and dupes and knaves with whom it is my misfortune to live, should war take place between your country and mine.

I need not tell you who are much better acquainted with modern history than I am, that Nations *drift* into wars, as we drifted into the late war with Russia, often thro' the want of a resolute hand at some moment early in the quarrel. So now, a courageous stroke, not of arms, but of moral action, may save you and us. I suppose the act of your Captain Wilkes was not directly authorised by your Government; if so, the difficulty will be smaller. You would not have authorised such an act against a friendly nation, calculated to rouse hostile feelings against you; you repudiate any infraction of international law; the capture of the Commissioners is of no value when set against the loss of that character for justice and courtesy which you have always sustained; and you are willing to abide by the law as declared by impartial arbitration. I hope opinion is not too strong and too excited to prevent your taking this moderate course.

It is common here to say that your Government cannot resist the mob violence by which it is surrounded. I do not believe this, and I know that our Government is often driven along by the force of the genteel and aristocratic mob which it mainly represents. But now in this crisis I fervently hope that you may act firmly and courteously. Any moderate course you may take will meet with great support here, and in the English Cabinet there are, as I

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certainly know, some who will gladly accept any fair proposition for friendly arrangement from your side.

Your Congress is just meeting, and your Foreign Relations Committee and your Senate will have this matter in hand. If you deal with it so wisely as to put our Government in the wrong in the sight of all moderate men here, you will not only avoid the perils now menacing but you will secure an amount of friendly sympathy here which hitherto unhappily has not been given you.

JOHN BRIGHT.

AVOID WAR WITH ENGLAND.

ROCHDALE, December 7, 1861.

Private.

Dear Mr. Sumner,—

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At all hazards you must not let this matter grow to a war with England, even if you are right and we are wrong. War will be fatal to your idea of restoring the Union and we know not what may survive its evil influences. I am not now considering its effects here—they may be serious enough, but I am looking alone to your great country, the hope of freedom and humanity, and I implore you not on any feeling that nothing can be conceded, and that England is arrogant and seeking a quarrel, to play the game of every enemy of your country. Nations in great crises and difficulties, have often done that which in their prosperous and powerful hour they would not have done, and they have done it without humiliation or disgrace. You may disappoint your enemies by the moderation and reasonableness of your conduct, and every honest and good man in England will applaud your wisdom. Put all the fire-eaters in the wrong, and Europe will admire the sagacity of your Government.

JOHN BRIGHT.

SPEECHES OF JOHN BRIGHT.

THE WAR AND SLAVERY.*

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They do not know in America . . . what is the opinion of the great body of the working classes in England. There has been every effort that money and malice could make to stimulate in Lancashire, amongst the suffering population, an expression of opinion in favour of the Slave States. They have not been able to get it. And I honour that population for their fidelity to principles and to freedom, and I say that the course they have taken ought to atone in the minds of the people of the United States for miles of leading articles, written by the London press,—by men who would barter every human right,—that they might serve the party with which they are associated.

But now I shall ask you one other question before I sit down,—How comes it that on the Continent there is not a liberal newspaper, nor a liberal politician, that has said, or has thought of saying, a word in favour of this portentous and monstrous shape which now asks to be received into the family of nations? Take the great Italian Minister, Count Cavour. You read some time ago in the paper part of a despatch which he wrote on the question of America—he had no difficulty in deciding. Ask Garibaldi. Is there in Europe a more disinterested and generous friend of freedom than Garibaldi? Ask that illustrious Hungarian, to whose marvellous eloquence you once listened in this hall. Will he tell you that slavery has nothing to do with it, and that the slaveholders of the South will liberate the negroes sooner than the North through the instrumentality of the war? Ask Victor Hugo, the poet of freedom,—the exponent, may I not call him, of the yearnings of all mankind for a better time? Ask any man in Europe who opens his lips for freedom,—who dips his pen in ink that he may indite a sentence for freedom,—whoever has a sympathy for freedom warm in his own heart,—ask him—he will

* Part of a speech made at Birmingham. December 18, 1862, to sound opinion on the war in America owing to the shortage of cotton.

have no difficulty in telling you on which side your sympathies should lie.*

Only a few days ago a German merchant in Manchester was speaking to a friend of mine, and said he had recently travelled all through Germany. He said, "I am so surprised,—I don't find one man in favour of the South." That is not true of Germany only, it is true of all the world except this island, famed for freedom, in which we dwell. I will tell you what is the reason. Our London press is mainly in the hands of certain ruling West End classes; it acts and writes in favour of those classes. I will tell you what they mean. One of the most eminent statesmen in this country,—one who has rendered the greatest services to the country, though I must say, not in an official capacity, in which men very seldom confer such great advantages upon the country,—he told me twice, at an interval of several months, "I had no idea how much influence the example of that Republic was having upon opinion here, until I discovered the universal congratulation that the Republic was likely to be broken up."

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But what I do blame is this. I blame men who are eager to admit into the family of nations a State which offers itself to us, based upon a principle, I will undertake to say, more odious and more blasphemous than was ever heretofore dreamed of in Christian or Pagan, in civilised or in savage times. The leaders of this revolt propose this monstrous thing—that over a territory forty times as large as England, the blight and curse of slavery shall be forever perpetuated.

I cannot believe, for my part, that such a fate will befall that fair land, stricken though it now is with the ravages of war. I cannot believe that civilisation, in its journey with the sun, will sink into endless night in order to gratify the ambition of the leaders of this revolt, who seek to

"Wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind."

I have another and a far brighter vision before my gaze.

* Compare Montalembert, "Triumph of the Union," OLD SOUTH LEAFLET No. 213, page 4.

It may be but a vision, but I will cherish it. I see one vast confederation stretching from the frozen North in unbroken line to the glowing South, and from the wild billows of the Atlantic westward to the calmer waters of the Pacific main,—and I see one people, and one language, and one law, and one faith, and over all that wide continent, the home of freedom, and a refuge for the oppressed of every race and of every clime.

THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM IN AMERICA.*

I feel as if we were in our places to-night, for we are met for the purpose of considering, and I doubt not, of agreeing to a resolution expressive of our sense of the generosity of the merchants of New York, and other citizens of the United States, who have, in the midst of so many troubles and such great sacrifices, contributed to the relief of that appalling distress which has prevailed, and does still prevail, in this country.

I regard this transmission of assistance from the United States as a proof that the world moves onward in the direction of a better time. It is an evidence that, whatever may be the faults of ambitious men, and sometimes may I not say, the crimes of Governments, the peoples are drawing together, and beginning to learn that it never was intended that they should be hostile to each other, but that every nation should take a brotherly interest in every other nation in the world.† There has been, as we all know, not a little jealousy between some portions of the people of this country and some portions of the people of the United States. Perhaps the jealousy has existed more on this side. I think it has found more expression here, probably through the means of the public press, than has been the case with them. I am not alluding now to the last two years, but as long as most of us have been readers of newspapers and observers of what has passed around us.

* This speech was delivered at a public meeting held in the Public Hall, Rochdale, February 3, 1863, for the purpose of passing a resolution of thanks to the merchants of New York, for their generous contributions to the relief of the suffering population of the cotton districts.

† John Bright advocated in a speech at Edinburgh in 1868 a League of Maritime Nations to protect the world from wars. Lord Fisher quotes from this speech in "His Memories," 1920.

Why England gets no Cotton.

Reference has been made, in the resolution and in the speeches, to the distress which prevails in this district, and you are told, and have been told over and over again, that all this distress has arisen from the blockade of the ports of the Southern States. There is at least one great port from which in past times two millions of bales of cotton a year have found their way to Europe—the port of New Orleans—which is blockaded; and the United States Government has proclaimed that any cotton that is sent from the interior to New Orleans for shipment, although it belongs to persons in arms against the Government, shall yet be permitted to go to Europe, and they shall receive unmolested the proceeds of the sale of that cotton. But still the cotton does not come. The reason why it does not come is not because it would do harm to the United States Government for it to come, or that it would in any way assist the United States Government in carrying on the war. The reason that it does not come is, because its being kept back is supposed to be a way of influencing public opinion in England and the course of the English Government in reference to the American war. They burn the cotton that they may injure us, and they injure us because they think that we cannot live even for a year without their cotton; and that to get it we should send ships of war, break the blockade, make war upon the North, and assist the slave owners to maintain, or to obtain, their independence.

Now, with regard to the question of American cotton, one or two extracts will be sufficient; but I could give you a whole pamphlet of them if it were necessary. Mr. Mann, an eminent person in the State of Georgia, says:—

“With the failure of the cotton, England fails. Stop her supply of Southern slave-grown cotton, and her factories stop, her commerce stops, the healthful normal circulation of her life-blood stops.”

Again he says:—

“In one year from the stoppage of England’s supply of Southern slave-grown cotton, the Chartists would be in all her streets and fields, revolution would be rampant throughout the island, and nothing that is would exist.”

He also says, addressing an audience:—

“Why, Sirs, British lords hold their lands, British bishops hold their revenues, Victoria holds her sceptre, by the grace of cotton, as surely as by the grace of God.”

Senator Wigfall says:—

“If we stop the supply of cotton for one week, England would be starving. Queen Victoria’s crown would not stand on her head one week, if the supply of cotton was stopped; nor would her head stand on her shoulders.”

Mr. Stephens, who is the Vice-President of the Southern Confederacy, says:—

“There will be revolution in Europe, there will be starvation there; our cotton is the element that will do it.”

Now, I am not stating the mere result of any discovery of my own, but it would be impossible to read the papers of the South, or the speeches made in the South, before, and at the time of, and after the secession, without seeing that the universal opinion there was, that the stoppage of the supply of cotton would be our instantaneous ruin, and that if they could only lay hold of it, keep it back in the country, or burn it, so that it never could be used, that then the people of Lancashire, merchants, manufacturers, and operatives in mills—everybody dependent upon this vast industry—would immediately arise and protest against the English Government abstaining for one moment from the recognition of the South, from war with the North, and from the resolution to do the utmost that we could to create a slave-holding independent republic in the South.

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Workers and Middle Classes firm for the Union.

The other day, not a week since, a member of the present Government,—he is not a statesman—he is the son of a great statesman, and occupies the position of Secretary for Ireland,—he dared to say to an English audience that he wished the Republic to be divided, and that the South should become an independent State. If that island which—I suppose in punishment for some of its offences—has been committed to his care,—if that island were to attempt to secede, not to set up a slave kingdom, but a kingdom more free than it has ever yet been, the Government of which he is a member

would sack its cities and drench its soil with blood before they would allow such a kingdom to be established.

But the working men of England, and I will say it too for the great body of the middle classes of England, have not been wrong upon this great question. As for you,—men labouring from morn till night that you may honourably and honestly maintain your families, and the independence of your households,—you are too slowly emerging from a condition of things far from independent—far from free—for you to have sympathy with this fearful crime which I have been describing. You come, as it were, from bonds yourselves, and you can sympathise with them who are still in bondage.

See that meeting that was held in Manchester a month ago, in the Free Trade Hall, of five or six thousand men. See the address which they there carried unanimously to the President of the United States.* See that meeting held the other night in Exeter Hall, in London; that vast room, the greatest room, I suppose, in the Metropolis, filled so much that its overflowings filled another large room in the same building, and when that was full, the further overflowings filled the street; and in both rooms, and in the street, speeches were made on this great question. But what is said by the writers in this infamous Southern press in this country with regard to that meeting? Who was there? “A gentleman who had written a novel, and two or three Dissenting ministers.” I shall not attempt any defence of those gentlemen. What they do, they do openly, in the face of day; and if they utter sentiments on this question, it is from the public platform, with thousands of their countrymen gazing into their faces. These men who slander them write behind a mask,—and, what is more, they dare not tell in the open day that which they write in the columns of their journal. But if it be true that there is nothing in the writer of a successful novel, or in two or three pious and noble-minded Dissenting ministers, to collect a great audience, what does it prove if there was a great audience? It only proves that they were not collected by the reputation of any orator who was expected to address them, but by their cordial and ardent sympathy for the great cause which was pleaded before them.

* Compare Lincoln’s reply, “Abraham Lincoln on War and Peace,” OLD SOUTH LEAFLET No. 214, page 7.

Everybody now that I meet says to me, "Public opinion seems to have undergone a considerable change." The fact is, people do not know very much about America. They are learning more every day. They have been greatly misled by what are called "the best public instructors." Jefferson, who was one of the greatest men that the United States have produced, said that newspapers should be divided into four compartments; in one of them they should print the true; in the next, the probable; in the third, the possible; and in the fourth, the lies. With regard to some of these newspapers, I incline to think, as far as their leading columns go, that an equal division of space would be found very inconvenient, and that the last-named compartment, when dealing with American questions, would have to be at least four times as large as the first.

We cannot be coldly neutral.

Coming back to the question of this war: I admit, of course—everybody must admit—that we are not responsible for it, for its commencement, or for the manner in which it is conducted; nor can we be responsible for its result. But there is one thing which we are responsible for, and that is for our sympathies, for the manner in which we regard it, and for the tone in which we discuss it. What shall we say, then with regard to it? On which side shall we stand? I do not believe it is possible to be strictly, coldly neutral. The question at issue is too great, the contest is too grand in the eye of the world. It is impossible for any man, who can have an opinion worth anything on any question, not to have some kind of an opinion on the question of this war. I am not ashamed of my opinion, or of the sympathy which I feel, and have over and over again expressed, on the side of the free North. I cannot understand how any man witnessing what is enacting on the American continent can indulge in small cavils against the free people of the North, and close his eye entirely to the enormity of the purposes of the South. I cannot understand how any Englishman, who in past years has been accustomed to say that "there was one foul blot upon the fair fame of the American Republic," can now express any sympathy for those who would perpetuate and extend

that blot. And, more, if we profess to be, though it be with imperfect and faltering steps, the followers of Him who declared it to be His Divine mission "to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised," must we not reject with indignation and scorn the proffered alliance and friendship with a power based on human bondage, and which contemplates the overthrow and the extinction of the dearest rights of the most helpless of mankind?

The American Union will endure.

If we are the friends of freedom, personal and political,—and we all profess to be so, and most of us, more or less, are striving after it more completely for our own country,—how can we withhold our sympathy from a Government and a people amongst whom white men have always been free, and who are now offering an equal freedom to the black? I advise you not to believe in the "destruction" of the American nation. If facts should happen by any chance to force you to believe it, do not commit the crime of wishing it. I do not blame men who draw different conclusions from mine from the facts, and who believe that the restoration of the Union is impossible. As the facts lie before our senses, so must we form a judgment on them. But I blame those men that wish for such a catastrophe. For myself, I have never despaired and I will not despair. In the language of one of our old poets, who wrote, I think, more than three hundred years ago, I will not despair,—

"For I have seen a ship in haven fall,
After the storm had broke both mast and shroud."

From the very outburst of this great convulsion, I have had but one hope and one faith, and it is this—that the result of this stupendous strife may be to make freedom the heritage for ever of a whole continent, and that the grandeur and the prosperity of the American Union may never be impaired.

THE ENGLISH WORKINGMAN AND THE STRUGGLE IN AMERICA.*

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There are men, good men, who say that we in England, who are opposed to war, should take no public part in this great question. Only yesterday I received from a friend of mine, whose fidelity I honour, a letter, in which he asked me whether I thought, with the views which he supposed I entertain on the question of war, it was fitting that I should appear at such a meeting as this. It is not our war; we did not make it. We deeply lament it. It is not in our power to bring it to a close; but I know not that we are called upon to shut our eyes and to close our hearts to the great issues which are depending upon it. Now we are met here, let us ask each other some questions. . . . Has England any sympathy, on one side or the other, with either party in this great struggle? But, to come nearer, I would ask whether this meeting has any opinion upon it, and whether our sympathies have been stirred in relation to it? It is true, to this meeting not many rich, not many noble, have been called. It is a meeting composed of artisans and workingmen of the city of London,—men whose labour, in combination with capital and directing skill, has built this great city, and has made England great. I address myself to these men. I ask them—I ask you—have you any special interest in this contest?

Privilege hopes American Democracy will fail.

Privilege thinks it has a great interest in it, and every morning, with blatant voice, it comes into your streets and curses the American Republic. Privilege has beheld an afflicting spectacle for many years past. It has beheld thirty millions of men, happy and prosperous, without emperor, without king, without the surroundings of a court, without nobles, except such as are made by eminence in intellect and virtue, without State bishops and State priests,—

“Sole venders of the lore which works salvation,”—

without great armies and great navies, without great debt

* This is one of Bright's greatest orations, made in London at St. James's Hall, March 26, 1863.

and without great taxes. Privilege has shuddered at what might happen to old Europe if this grand experiment should succeed. But you, the workers,—you, striving after a better time,—you, struggling upwards towards the light, with slow and painful steps,—you have no cause to look with jealousy upon a country which, amongst all the great nations of the globe, is that one where labour has met with the highest honour, and where it has reaped its greatest reward.

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At this moment, such of you as read the City articles of the daily papers will see that a loan has been contracted for in the City, to the amount of three millions sterling, on behalf of the Southern Confederacy. It is not brought into the market by any firm with an English name; but I am sorry to be obliged to believe that many Englishmen have taken portions of that loan. Now the one great object of that loan is this, to pay in this country for vessels which are being built—*Alabamas*—from which it is hoped that so much irritation will arise in the minds of the people of the Northern States, that England may be dragged into war to take sides with the South and with slavery. The South was naturally hostile to England, because England was hostile to slavery. Now the great hope of the insurrection has been from the beginning, that Englishmen would not have fortitude to bear the calamities which it has brought upon us; but by some trick or by some accident we might be brought into a war with the North, and thereby give strength to the South.

The People's instincts are right.

I should hope that this question is now so plain that most Englishmen must understand it; and least of all do I expect that the six millions of men in the United Kingdom who are not enfranchised can have any doubt upon it. Their instincts are always right in the main, and if they get the facts and information, I can rely on their influence being thrown into the right scale. I wish I could state what would be as satisfactory to myself with regard to some others. There may be men outside, there are men sitting amongst your legislators, who will build and equip corsair ships to prey upon the commerce of a friendly power,—

who will disregard the laws and the honour of their country, —who will trample on the Proclamation of their sovereign, —and who, for the sake of the glittering profit which sometimes waits on crime, are content to cover themselves with everlasting infamy. There may be men, too—rich men—in this city of London, who will buy in the ‘slave-owners’ loan, and who, for the chance of more gain than honest dealing will afford them, will help a conspiracy whose fundamental institution, whose corner-stone, is declared to be felony, and infamous by the statutes of their country.

I speak not of these men—I leave them to their conscience in that hour which comes to all of us, when conscience speaks and the soul is not longer deaf to her voice. I speak rather to you, the workingmen of London, the representatives, as you are here to-night, of the feelings and the interests of the millions who cannot hear my voice. I wish you to be true to yourselves. Dynasties may fall, aristocracies may perish, privilege will vanish into the dim past; but you, your children, and your children’s children will remain, and from you the English people will be continued to succeeding generations.

You wish the freedom of your country. You wish it for yourselves. You strive for it in many ways. Do not then give the hand of fellowship to the worst foes of freedom that the world has ever seen, and do not, I beseech you, bring down a curse upon your cause which no after-penitence can ever lift from it. You will not do this. I have faith in you. Impartial history will tell that, when your statesmen were hostile or coldly neutral, when many of your rich men were corrupt, when your press—which ought to have instructed and defended—was mainly written to betray, the fate of a continent and of its vast population being in peril, you clung to freedom with an unfaltering trust that God in His infinite mercy will yet make it the heritage of all His children.

DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT ON THE QUESTION OF RECOGNIZING THE SOUTHERN CONFEDERACY.*

HOUSE OF LORDS.

EARL RUSSELL: "When we feel ourselves bound to interfere—and may it be seldom—it will be an interference in the cause of liberty and to promote the freedom of mankind, as we have hitherto done in these cases. . . . I trust that with regard to this civil war in America we may be able to continue our impartial and neutral course. Depend upon it, my Lords, that if that war is to cease, it is far better it should cease by a conviction, both on the part of the North and the South, that they can never live again happily as one community and one republic, than that the termination of hostilities should be brought about by the advice, the mediation, or the interference of any European Power. I repeat, I have spoken only of the duty of the Government at the present time, and I trust that there will now be no further debate on this subject."

HOUSE OF COMMONS.†

MR. ROEBUCK,‡ after presenting a Petition praying the House to enter into negotiations with the great Powers of

* This question was taken up first in the House of Lords in the latter part of 1862. Lord Campbell supported the resolution strongly. It is said to have been instigated by the Laird firm that had built some powerful ironclad rams that they wished to deliver to the Confederacy. Earl Russell, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, delivered the best speech in opposition to the resolution. The conclusion of his speech of March 23, 1863, is given above.

† This debate began on June 30, 1863, in the lower house of Parliament.

‡ Henry Adams, who as private secretary to the American Minister viewed this debate from the gallery, describes John A. Roebuck as "a rather comical personage . . . with a bitter tongue and a mind enfeebled more than common by the political epidemic of gloom." Roebuck represented the cause of the Laird firm, makers of sea raiders. Lamar represented the Confederacy in London and was favored by a seat on the floor of the House of Commons. He was much disappointed in Roebuck as the champion of the Confederacy. Roebuck replied to Lamar when asked if he feared John Bright: "Bright and I have met before. It was the old story—the story of the sword-fish and the whale! No Sir! Mr. Bright will not cross swords with me again!" But Lamar soon discovered that the sword-fish was getting the worst of it. See "The Education of Henry Adams," 1918, pages 186-188.

Europe, with the object of recognizing the independence of the Confederate States of America, said: "I now appeal to the House—to its honour and duty—to ask the Crown to enter into negotiations with the great Powers for the purpose of acknowledging the independence of the Southern States of North America. . . . I say at once we ought to acknowledge the independence of the South; and why? First, because they have a right to claim it. They are a gallant people, who, with a very small force have resisted and conquered the North. They have rolled back the tide of invasion. It is not Richmond that is now in peril, but Washington; and if there be terror anywhere, it is in the minds of the merchants of New York. I see my honoured and learned Friend and Solicitor General in his place, and I ask him if he can refute this statement of international law, that when a people, having determined to be free, have proved their power of resistance, we are justified in acknowledging their independence; and that, as Sir James Mackintosh said, there would be no *casus belli* in our doing so. Well, then, shall we acknowledge the South? I say aye—first, because in point of fact they have vindicated their freedom; and next because it is our interest. At the present moment there is exhibited a phenomenon never seen in the history of mankind. Ten millions of civilised men, producing three of the great necessary commodities of Europe—cotton, sugar, and tobacco—are thrown upon the world for customers. They have cut their connection with the North. They have said to England: 'We are here producing all you want in the shape of cotton, producing nearly all you want in the shape of sugar and tobacco. Thousands—nay, nearly a million, of your people are suffering from the want of these very commodities which we can supply. We offer ourselves to you as customers.' Are we not prepared to accept that offer? What is it that prevents our recognising these States? I look at the Treasury bench, and sorry am I to observe the absence of the noble Lord who is really the Government [Lord Palmerston]. I ask those hon. and right hon. Gentlemen, what is it that is in the minds of those who want us to refrain from accepting this great boon to England and doing this great justice to America? We are met by the assertion, 'Oh, England cannot acknowledge a State in which slavery exists.' Indeed, I ask, is that

really the case, and is any man so weak as to believe it? Have we not acknowledged Brazil? Are we not in constant communication with Russia? And is there not slavery in both those countries? Moreover, does anybody believe that the black slave would be at all improved in his condition by being placed in the same position as the free black in the North? I ask whether the North, hating slavery, if you will, does not hate the slave still more? [A few "Noes!" drowned in cheers.] I pity the ignorance of the Gentleman who says 'No.' The blacks are not permitted to take an equal station in the North. They are not permitted to enter the same carriage, to pray to God in the same part of the church, or to sit down at the same table with the whites. They are like the hunted dog whom everybody may kick. But in the South the feeling is very different. There black children and white children are brought up together. ["No!"] I say it without fear of contradiction from any one whose contradiction is worthy of notice. In the South there is not that hatred, that contempt of the black man which exists in the North. There is a kindly feeling in the minds of the Southern planters towards those whom England fixed there in a condition of servitude. England forced slavery upon the Southern States of America. It was not their doing. They prayed and entreated England not to establish slavery in their dominions; but we did it, because it suited our interests, and the Gentlemen who now talk philanthropy, talked the other way. [Laughter, and a cry of "They were not living then."] No, but their ancestors were, and we have the same class nowadays, with the same sort of cant and hypocrisy. Every man who has studied the question will distinctly understand the difference between the feeling of the Northern gentleman and that of the Southern planter towards the black. There is a sort of horror, a sort of shivering in the Northerner when he comes across a black. He feels as if he were contaminated by the very fact that a black man is on an equality with him. That is not the case in the South. I am not now speaking in favour of slavery. Slavery to me is as distasteful as it is to the hon. Member for Birmingham; but I have learnt to bear with other men's infirmities, and I do not think every man a rogue or a fool who differs from me in opinion. But, though I hate slavery, I cannot help seeing the great distinction between

the condition of the black in the North, and his condition in the South. I believe, that if to-morrow you could make all the blacks in the South like the free negroes in the North, you would do them a great injury. The cry in the North in favour of the black is a hypocritical cry, and to-morrow the North would join with the South, and fasten slavery on the necks of the blacks, if the South would only re-enter the Union. But the South never will come into the Union, and—what is more—I hope it never may. I will tell you why I say so. America, while she was one, ran a race of prosperity unparalleled in the world. Eighty years made the Republic such a Power, that if she had continued as she was a few years longer, she would have been the great bully of the world. Why, Sir, she

“ . . . bestrode the narrow world,
Like a Colossus; and we petty men
Walked under her huge legs, and peeped about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.”

As far as my influence goes, I am determined to do all I can to prevent the re-construction of the Union, and I hope that the balance of Power on the American continent will, in future, prevent any one State from tyrannising over the world as the Republic did.* Could anything be more insulting than her conduct towards us? Yet we who turned upon Greece—we who bullied Brazil—we crawled upon our bellies to the United States. They could not treat us contemptuously enough to raise our ire; but at last, when the secession took place, we plucked up courage, and resented the outrage upon the *Trent*. I say, then, that the Southern States have vindicated their right to recognition. They hold out to us advantages such as the world has never seen before. I hold, besides, that it would be of the greatest importance that the reconstruction of the Union should not take place.

Such is the state of things at the present moment. The South offers to us perfect free trade; but if we allow this contest to go on—if we cower, as we have done hitherto, before the North, the Southerners will soon become a manufacturing population, and the boon will be withdrawn from us. But, if they ought to be recognised, and if the time has come,

* It is greatly to the credit of Mr. Roebuck's constituency, Sheffield, that he lost his seat in Parliament in the election of 1868 owing to his attitude toward America.

is the mode I propose a right one? The mode I propose is, that this House should pray the Queen to enter into communication with the great Powers of Europe with a view to the recognition of the South."

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LORD ROBERT MONTAGUE: . . . "Some years ago there were fears entertained about Ireland, and it was merely surmised that America was going to help the Irish; the whole of this country was indignant and agitated by a most excusable rage and anger at the bare suspicion of such a thing. But now they were called upon to do that which they had denounced on the mere supposition that it was about to be done by others."

THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER [GLADSTONE]: "Sir, I am desirous, at the commencement of such remarks as I have to offer to the House, to take a lesson from the hon. and learned Member for Sheffield (Mr. Roebuck), who told us he had learnt to bear with the opinions of others when they differed from his own. I wish to record my adhesion to that sentiment; I may go, indeed, a step further, and say that I think it is the duty of every Member of this House, and most of all of every adviser of the Crown, in approaching this question, to use his best endeavours to suppress within his breast everything like passion—I would almost say to lay aside every vestige of feeling even in regard to it. Our duty is to treat this matter as one of dry fact, and, however passion and feeling may tend to intrude themselves into the arena of reason, to strive to hold the balance even, and to deliver our judgment with as much impartiality, as much abnegation of all selfish prejudices, and of all angry emotion, as if we were sitting on the bench of justice, or in the box of jurymen. It is impossible, if we look at the matter as one of feeling, not to see that the feelings with which we must regard it are very mixed. If we take the case of the Southern States, there can only be few who do not sympathise with a resistance as heroic as ever has been offered in the history of the world on the part of a weaker body against the overpowering and vastly superior forces of a stronger. But, on the other hand, if we look at the cause of the South from that point of view in which it stands so intimately con-

nected with at least professions of strict adherence to slavery, a strong counter-current of feeling must arise in the mind.

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Nor do I agree with the hon. and learned Member for Sheffield when he says that the American Union had become so vast and so menacing to the world, that we were in danger of dwindling beside it, or of experiencing a defect of power to maintain our rights. I do not think that territorial extension necessarily adds to the vigour of a State. I do not admit that either England or France, or any other country of Europe, had lost, or was relatively losing, strength in comparison with the United States of America, or was less able than before to assert every just claim and every legitimate interest in the face of the great Republic. I have always been of opinion, that involved as England is, not so much as a matter of mere interest, but on considerations of duty and honour, with respect to the British North American Colonies, the balanced state of the old American Union, which caused the whole of American politics to turn upon the relative strength of the slavery and Northern interests, was more favourable to us, more likely to insure the continuance of peaceful relations in America, as well as the avoidance of all political complications arising from the connection between this country and its Colonies, than the state of things which would exist if the old American Union were to be divided into a cluster of Northern, and a cluster of Southern States. The cluster of Northern States, having lost all connection with the slavery interests that were formerly averse to extension northwards, would have, of course, every motive—I do not say by violent or illegitimate measures—to endeavour to re-establish their territorial grandeur by uniting themselves with the British Colonies of North America.*

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But if there be one moment more inconvenient than another for the Motion of the hon. and learned Member for Sheffield, I think the hon. and learned Gentleman will himself confess that this is that moment. The Motion of the

*Mr. Gladstone earlier in the war expressed the belief that the South would win the war. Emancipation and successes of the North no doubt account for his change of feeling.

hon. and learned Member for Sheffield is peculiarly inconvenient at the present moment. I do not say that the main result of this contest is, humanly speaking, in any degree doubtful; but certainly there has not been a single epoch during the whole period of the war, which has now been raging for more than two years, at which there were pending military issues of such vast moment, both in the east and the west—issues so important with reference to the future position and interests of either or both belligerents.

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But the speech of my hon. and learned Friend had an importance far beyond the epithets which he may have launched against this or that man, or which may be launched against him in return. He cannot disguise—he will not disguise—he is much too candid, sincere, upright, and manly to disguise—that the whole of that speech from beginning to end was couched in the spirit of the strongest partisanship for the South—in a spirit, I may almost say, of passionate partisanship for the South.

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I must confess there are the strongest reasons why England at any rate should in this matter abstain from taking the prominent part recommended by the hon. and learned Member. The very fact of our enormous interests in the American Continent, make us, as it were, a party in the struggle, and that very circumstance would deprive us of that character of impartiality by which alone intervention could be rendered useful. The hon. and learned Gentleman, indeed, recommended concert on our part with the other nations of Europe, but in his speech that was reduced to the case of France. But what is the position of France on the American Continent? I grant the position of France for a long period in regard to the United States was an admirable one for delivering a judgment and administering a lesson, for so it must be, of moral weight in the general interest of humanity, because France had taken a practical share in the original establishment of American independence, and never at any period was seriously implicated in controversy with the United States. But how does she stand now? France, by her expedition to Mexico and the

greatness of her military engagements there, is even more decidedly and distinctly a party on the American continent than is England. I may be too sanguine—I do not speak with authority—but though America is from tradition, usage, and perhaps from national character, accustomed to assert her independence of Europe, both as to material, force, and opinion, I do believe that the impartial and well-ascertained spirit of Europe would have the greatest weight in America; but I must say this, I feel that England and France, circumstanced as they are, even if united in the act of recognition, would not be able to stand up in the face of the world and say, we claim to represent the impartial opinion of Europe. I know of no benefit or advantage that would attach to any intervention, arbitration, recognition, or interference of any sort, unless it was entirely free from all suspicion of partial or separate interest, or peculiar views.”

MR. W. E. FORSTER:* “The recognition of the South would be a *casus belli* if the North chose to make use of it; and it was mere idle talk and empty boasting if we were not prepared to enforce it. The Motion of the hon. and learned Gentleman meant war, or it meant nothing. He believed, from the language which he had held, that the hon. and learned Gentleman was utterly reckless whether it would have that effect or not. But, whether he meant war or not, did the country mean war? No doubt there was some sympathy felt for the South in various quarters, and he would allow the Southerners had shown a courage which deserved sympathy; but he did not believe that the sympathies of any class of people to this country went so far as to submit to an additional income tax for the purpose of defending Canada.

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A war with the United States would be dangerous to us on several grounds. It would be dangerous to our commerce, and it would be dangerous to Canada; but it ought to

* William Edward Forster, liberal M. P. from Leeds: “Pure gold, without a trace of base metal; honest, unselfish, practical, he took up the Union Cause and made himself its champion, as a true Yorkshireman was sure to do, partly because of his Quaker anti-slavery convictions, and partly because it gave him a practical opening in the house.”—“The Education of Henry Adams,” page 125.

be unpopular on far higher grounds, because it would be a war against our own kinsmen for slavery."

MR. BRIGHT: . . . "We sometimes are engaged in discussions, and have great difficulty to know what we are about; but the hon. Gentleman left us in no kind of doubt when he sat down. He proposed a resolution, in words which, under certain circumstances and addressed to certain parties, might end in offensive or injurious consequences. Taken in connection with his character, and with the speech he has made to-night, and with the speech he has recently made elsewhere on this subject, I may say that he would have come to about the same conclusion if he had proposed to address the Crown inviting the Queen to declare war against the United States of America. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is known not to be very zealous in the particular line of opinion I have adopted, addressed the hon. Gentleman in the smoothest language possible, but still he was obliged to charge him with the bitter tone of hostility which marked his speech.

On a recent occasion the hon. Member addressed some members of his constituency—I do not mean in his last speech, I mean in the speech in August last year—in which he entered upon a course of prophecy which, like most prophecies in our day, does not happen to come true. But he said then what he said to-night, that the American people and Government were overbearing. He did not tell his constituents that the Government of the United States had, almost during the whole of his lifetime, been conducted by his friends of the South. He said that, if they were divided, they would not be able to bully the whole world; and he made use of these expressions: "The North will never be our friends; of the South you can make friends,—they are Englishmen,—they are not the scum and refuse of the world.'"

MR. ROEBUCK: "Allow me to correct that statement. What I said I now state to the House, that the men of the South were Englishmen, but that the Army of the North was composed of the scum of Europe."

MR. BRIGHT: "I take, of course, that explanation of the hon. and learned Gentleman, with this explanation from

me, that there is not, so far as I can find, any mention near that paragraph, and I think there is not in the speech a single word, about the army."

MR. ROEBUCK: "I assure you I said that."

MR. BRIGHT: "Then I take it for granted that the hon. and learned Gentleman said that, or that if he said what I have read he greatly regrets it."

MR. ROEBUCK: "No, I did not say it."

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MR. BRIGHT: "I now come to the proposition which the hon. and learned Gentleman has submitted to the House, and which he has already submitted to a meeting of his constituents at Sheffield. At that meeting, on the 27th of May, the hon. and learned Gentleman used these words: 'What I have to consider is, what are the interests of England: what is for her interests I believe to be for the interests of the world.' Now, leaving out of consideration the latter part of that statement, if the hon. and learned Gentleman will keep to the first part of it, then what we have now to consider in this question is, what is for the interest of England. But the hon. and learned Gentleman has put it to-night in almost as offensive a way as he did before at Sheffield, and has said that the United States would not bully the world if they were divided and subdivided; for he went so far as to contemplate division into more than two independent sections. I say that the whole of his case rests upon a miserable jealousy of the United States, or on what I may term a base fear. It is a fear which appears to me just as groundless as any of those panics by which the hon. and learned Gentleman has attempted to frighten the country.

There never was a State in the world which was less capable of aggression with regard to Europe than the United States of America. I speak of its Government, of its confederation, of the peculiarities of its organisation; for the House will agree with me, that nothing is more peculiar than the fact of the great power which the separate States, both of the North and South, exercise upon the policy and course of the country. I will undertake to say, that, unless in a question of overwhelming magnitude, which would be able to

unite any people, it would be utterly hopeless to expect that all the States of the American Union would join together to support the central Government in any plan of aggression on England or any other country of Europe.

I want to show the hon. and learned Gentleman that England is not interested in the course he proposes we should take; and when I speak of interests, I mean the commercial interests, the political interests, and the moral interests of the country. At first, with regard to the supply of cotton, in which the noble Lord the Member for Stamford takes such a prodigious interest.

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I believe that the war which is now raging in America is more likely to abolish slavery than not, and more likely to abolish it than any other thing that can be proposed in the world. I regret very much that the pride and passion of men are such as to justify me in making this statement. The supply of cotton under slavery must always be insecure. The House felt so in past years; for at my recommendation they appointed a committee, and but for the folly of a foolish Minister they would have appointed a special commission to India at my request.

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The great bulk of the land in the Southern States is uncultivated. Ten thousand square miles are appropriated to the cultivation of cotton; but there are six hundred thousand square miles, or sixty times as much land, which is capable of being cultivated for cotton. It was, however, impossible that the land should be so cultivated, because, although you had the climate and sun, you had no labour. The institution of slavery forbade free-labour men in the North to come to the South; and every emigrant that landed in New York from Europe knew that the Slave States were no States for him, and therefore he went North or West. The laws of the United States, the sentiments of Europe and of the world, being against any opening of the slave trade, the planters of the South were shut up, and the annual increase in the supply of cotton could only increase in the same proportion as the annual increase in the number of their negroes.

Now there is one more point to which the hon. and learned Gentleman will forgive me if I allude—he does not appear to me to think it of great importance—and that is, the morality of this question. The right hon. Gentleman, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the hon. Gentleman who spoke from the bench behind—and, I think, the noble Lord if I am not mistaken—referred to the carnage which is occasioned by this lamentable strife. Well, carnage, I presume, is the accompaniment of all war. Two years ago the press of London ridiculed very much the battles of the United States, in which nobody was killed and few were hurt. There was a time when I stood up in this House, and pointed out the dreadful horrors of war. There was a war waged by this country in the Crimea; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with an uneasy conscience, is constantly striving to defend that struggle. That war—for it lasted about the same time the American War has lasted—at least destroyed as many lives as are estimated to have been destroyed in the United States.

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Now, I will ask the right hon. Gentleman, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and those who are of opinion with him on this question of slaughter in the American war—a slaughter which I hope there is no hon. Member here, and no person out of this House, that does not in his calm moments look upon with grief and horror—to consider what was the state of things before the war. It was this: that every year in the Slave States of America there were one hundred and fifty thousand children born into the world—born with the badge and doom of slavery—born to the liability by law, and by custom, and by the devilish cupidity of man—to the lash and to the chain and to the branding-iron, and to be taken from their families and carried they know not where.

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In conclusion, Sir, I have only this to say,—that I wish to take a generous view of this question,—a view, I say, generous with regard to the people with whom we are in amity, whose Minister we receive here, and who receive our Minister in Washington. We see that the Government of the United States has for two years past been contending

for its life, and we know that it is contending necessarily for human freedom. That Government affords the remarkable example—offered for the first time in the history of the world—of a great Government coming forward as the organised defender of law, freedom, and equality.”

John Bright was born at Rochdale, Lancashire, in 1811. He was a small capitalist and a friend of labor. His statesmanship lay in the field of agitating reforms by his oratory, rather than framing bills as a member of Parliament. His speeches place him in the first rank as an orator in the nineteenth century. In religion he was an ardent Nonconformist, a member of the Quaker Faith. Bright was a sincere friend of humanity and a bitter enemy of injustice wherever he found it to exist. He followed Jeremy Bentham's principle of “the greatest happiness for the greatest number.” Bright made his first appearance in public as the orator of the Anti-Corn Law League. Richard Cobden, who deserves most credit for the repeal of these protective measures for English landowners, won Bright over to the cause. The Crimean War, 1852-55, Bright considered unjust and unnecessary, and denounced it with a passion of oratory even though the war was popular with the masses who claimed Bright as their great friend in the days of Repeal. Bright, although a friend of the workingman, believed there was greater need of reform among the rural workers, and therefore did not support Shaftesbury's factory reform program. In his own cotton mill in Lancashire, a very happy relationship existed between himself and his workers. England's policy of repression in Ireland, Bright condemned as unwise and unjust. A policy which sent millions of Irish to America as enemies of Great Britain, Bright predicted would some day cause England unfortunate embarrassment. Though a champion of Irish reform Bright did not support Gladstone's Home Rule Bill in 1886. John Bright was a democrat who worked for and sympathized with the masses without desiring their applause. Therefore he repeatedly rejected invitations to go to America, where he was so much beloved.

Bright's speeches are here reprinted from James E. Thorold Rogers's “Speeches by John Bright, M.P.,” 2 vols. (London, 1868). The parliamentary debate is taken from Hansard's “Parliamentary Debates,” Vol. CLXXI (London, 1868). An excellent collection of his letters to Charles Sumner is published in the “Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society,” November, 1911. George Trevelyan's “Life of John Bright” (1913) and R. Barry O'Brien's “John Bright” (1911) are the best biographies, including parts of letters and speeches.

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